

British Theatre Guide

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Fiddler on the Roof

Book by Joseph Stein, Music by Jerry Bock, Lyrics by Sheldon Harnick
Savoy Theatre
(2007)

There may be a large number of people on stage and many more involved behind the scenes but this really is the Henry Goodman show, especially during the first half of Lindsay Posner's three-hour long revival of a much-loved favourite.

The star is superb in the role of Tevye, the milkman immortalised by Topol on stage and screen, but originally created on Broadway in 1964 by Zero Mostel.

To an extent, Goodman draws on his unforgettable Shylock for Trevor Nunn at the National, in which he allowed his Jewishness free rein, as a father struggling to bring up a daughter in an alien world.

The accent and the body language say so much and luckily, he is also given more than his (and everyone else's) fair share of laughs. As if this was not enough, his voice first heard rendering the musical's most famous song, *If I Were a Rich Man*, is to say the least attractive.

Goodman portrays Tevye as a warm, witty, caring father living through times of change and terror, overseen by his guardian angel, a magical fiddler who looks down on proceedings like a character straight from a Chagall painting.

There is one credit missing around this revival. The programme and hoardings have completely forgotten the man who started the whole thing off. Sholom Aleichem not only wrote the comically touching short stories on which the musical was based but lived the life in Russia in the late 19th century when yet again, his people were threatened with a pogrom, victimised and chased away.

Without him, there would be no musical, or if there were, it would lack the unique, self-effacing wit that gives it its richness.

The story is set in the tiny Russian village of Anatevka, also the title of the sweetest of the evening's songs.

There, the milkman and his wife, Golde played by Beverley Klein bring up their five daughters attempting to abide by the family motto, "Tradition". Unfortunately, times change and what was good enough for their parents shocks the girls, never more so than the idea that the town's dreadful gossiping matchmaker (another famous song) - Julie Legrand's Yente - should choose them a husband such as the fat, ugly butcher Lazar Wolf when there are lots of eligible bachelors around.

Much of the ultra-romantic plotting centres on the efforts of the youngsters to escape parental clutches to marry the men of their dreams, which eventually the three oldest all manage but only after many tears are shed (on- and off-stage).

Along the way, there are many ups and downs as well as opportunities for the best actress amongst them (Frances Thorburn playing the eldest, Tzeitel) and especially Alexandra Silber and Natasha Bloomfield as her two sisters, to show off their singing talents.

The best matched singing of the evening comes when Hodel, played by Miss Silber, finally gets together for a duet with Damien Hubley as politically-active young teacher Perchik. *Now I Have Everything* reveals both lightness and real power in each of their voices.

Just as the evening begins to get overly schmaltzy, a much darker element is introduced with the arrival of the authorities, who not only harass the Jews but by the end, send them to the corners of the Earth, Tevye, like his creator, heading for the United States.

With Jerome Robbins' choreography that hits a peak when the guys get together for athletic dances of battle and marriage heralding the interval, the evening has its fireworks although with 17 scenes and an epilogue, it might benefit from a little pruning.

As well as the highlights, there are some letdowns, none more than Peter McIntosh's drab wooden set, which features a slow revolve that holds up the action between each and every scene.

However, audiences will get exactly what they have paid for: a good old sentimental evening of Yiddish song and dance fronted by a real star. There are also some great laughs and a chance to leave the theatre humming three or four favourite tunes.

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Reviewer: [Philip Fisher](#)